

4.13 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

This section describes existing agricultural resources and describes whether implementation of the proposed Project would convert “Prime Farmland,” “Unique Farmland,” or “Farmland of Statewide Importance” to non-agricultural use; conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract; or involve other changes to the existing environment, which, due to their location, could result in conversion of farmland to other non-agricultural use.

4.13.1 Environmental Setting

The onshore portion of the Ellwood Marine Terminal (EMT) site is situated on a primarily flat coastal marine terrace. The EMT has been continuously operated as a barge-and-tanker crude-oil transfer facility since 1929. The project site is not zoned for agriculture and is not part of a Williamson Act Agricultural Preserve contract that would commit it to long-term agricultural uses. There are no agricultural properties or activities located adjacent to or in the vicinity of the EMT.

Portions of the Ellwood-Devereux Coast in the vicinity of the EMT have been used for agriculture in the past, but there are no active agricultural operations on lands in this area now. Historically, this area had been used as rangeland and to grow crops, including dry farming. This trend began with the arrival of the Spanish missionaries in the late 1700s, escalated in the mid- to late-1800s, involved the conversion of wetlands to agriculture in the early- to mid- 1900s, and ended by the mid- to late-1960s when urbanization and development in the area effectively removed any remaining agricultural operations from the project area (UCSB 2004).

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Soil Conservation Service’s Soil Survey, Santa Barbara County, California South Coastal Part (USDA 1981), EMT site soils are Concepcion fine sandy loam, which have a Class III irrigated soil capability rating. The Soil Conservation Service and the County consider Class III soils to be non-prime agricultural soils (USDA 1981). This area includes soils that have severe limitations that preclude their use for commercial crop production and restrict their use to grazing and urban development. Neither the project site nor its vicinity is considered unique agricultural land or Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance and neither contains unique agricultural resources (Santa Barbara County 2002). Because the project site consists of Class III Concepcion series “non-prime” soils and is zoned and designated for open space, it is not considered a viable potential agricultural resource.

4.13.2 Regulatory Setting

Federal

The Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981 protects Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance. As previously noted, such lands are not found in the project area.

State

The California Department of Conservation is charged with developing programs for the protection of the agricultural resources of the State. Based on data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the USDA, the California Department of Conservation has developed a Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) to classify the different agricultural soil types according to their ability to sustain agricultural crops (UCSB 2004).

The mapping program was created in 1982 in response to a need to assess the location, quality, and quantity of agricultural lands to deal with the loss of important farmland to development. The mapping program is used under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other State laws (including Government Code section 65561) to measure the impact on the production of food and other agricultural products of eliminating different kinds of lands. Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines refers to this classification system for the evaluation of the potential for significant environmental impacts (UCSB 2004).

The FMMP's Important Farmland Maps classify agricultural lands as "Prime Farmland" and "Farmland of Statewide Importance." The broad definitions for these two categories are provided below:

- Prime Farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical features for the long-term production of agricultural crops. This land can economically produce sustained high yields when treated and managed according to accepted modern farming methods. The land must have been used for the production of irrigated crops at some time during the two updated cycles prior to the current mapping date.
- Farmland of Statewide Importance is land with a good combination of physical and chemical features, but with minor shortcomings, such as greater slopes or

with less ability to hold and store moisture. The land must have been cropped at some time prior to the mapping date.

Whether a farmland is considered to be Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance is determined by the soil's meeting the specific physical and chemical criteria specified by the USDA NRCS. The NRCS compiles lists of which soils in each survey area meet the quality criteria. Factors considered in qualification of a soil by NRCS include water moisture regimes, available water capacity, developed irrigation water supply, soil temperature range, acid alkali balance, water table, soil sodium content, flooding, erodability, permeability rate, rock fragment content, and soil rooting depth (UCSB 2004).

The Williamson Act program, officially known as the California Land Conservation Act, was adopted in 1965. The California Department of Conservation administers this program, which allows land used in farming or ranching to be taxed at a rate based on the actual use of the land for agricultural purposes as opposed to its unrestricted market value. In return, the landowner commits to restricting use of the land to agricultural or open space for at least 10 years (UCSB 2004).

Sections of the California Coastal Act Coastal Resources Planning and Management Policies (30241 – 30243) include provisions for the protection and management of coastal agricultural resources by maximizing and maintaining prime agricultural land (30241, 30241.5, 30242) and preserving the long-term productivity of soils (30243). Coastal Act section 30241 states in part, "The maximum amount of prime agricultural land shall be maintained in agricultural production... and conflicts shall be minimized between agricultural and urban land uses..." (Santa Barbara County 2004).

Local

Santa Barbara County's Agricultural Element (Santa Barbara County 1989) includes policies and development standards to minimize significant impacts resulting from agricultural land conversion. Policy II.D of the County Agricultural Element states that the conversion of highly productive agricultural lands, whether in areas designated urban or rural, shall be discouraged, and that the County shall support programs that encourage the retention of highly productive agricultural lands. In addition, Santa Barbara County Agricultural Element Policy III.B states that it is a County priority to retain blocks of productive agriculture within urban areas where reasonable, to continue

to explore programs to support that use, and to recognize the importance of the objectives of the County's Right-to-Farm Ordinance.

4.13.3 Significance Criteria

A project would have a significant effect on the environment if it would:

- Convert prime agricultural land to non-agricultural use or impair the agricultural productivity of prime agricultural land;
- Conflict with agricultural preserve programs; or
- Affect any unique or other Farmland of State or Local Importance.

4.13.4 Impact Analysis And Mitigation

The proposed Project would not result in the construction of new facilities or the modification of existing facilities. Normal operations of the proposed Project would not result in impacts to agricultural resources, since there are no active agricultural operations in the project area. Additionally, no designated Prime Farmland or lands under Williamson Act contracts are present in the project area and the project site is not considered a viable potential agricultural resource. Should a spill occur, removal of topsoils may be required as part of spill clean-up and remediation. However, since the soils are considered Class III, non-unique agricultural lands, and are not Farmlands of Statewide or Local Importance, this ground disturbance would have no impact on agricultural resources.

4.13.5 Impacts of Alternatives

No Project Alternative

Under the No Project Alternative, Venoco's lease would not be renewed and the existing marine terminal would be subsequently decommissioned with its components abandoned in place, removed, or a combination thereof. The decommissioning of the marine terminal would be governed by an Abandonment and Restoration Plan, a copy of which has been submitted to the CSLC, Santa Barbara County, and the city of Goleta as a component of Venoco's "Development Plan Application for Ellwood Oil Pipeline Installation and Field Improvements" (Venoco 2005). Under the No Project Alternative, an alternative means of crude oil transportation would either need to be in place prior to

decommissioning of the EMT or production at Platform Holly would cease. A consequence of the absence of the EMT and alternative crude oil transportation methods would be that the petroleum resources associated with the South Ellwood Field would be stranded, at least temporarily. It is more likely, however, that under the No Project Alternative, Venoco would pursue alternative means of traditional crude oil transportation such as truck transportation or a pipeline. For purposes of this EIR, it has been assumed that the No Project Alternative would result in a decommissioning schedule that would consider implementation of one of the described transportation options. Any future crude oil transportation option would be the subject of a subsequent application to the CSLC, city of Goleta, or Santa Barbara County, depending on the proposed option. This Alternative would not result in impacts to agricultural resources, since there are no active agricultural operations in the project area. Additionally, no designated Prime Farmland or lands under Williamson Act contracts are present in the project area.

Truck Transportation

If this method of crude oil transportation is selected, the produced oil would be shipped from the EOF via trucks to the Venoco Carpinteria Oil and Gas Processing Facility (Venoco Carpinteria Facility) instead of being shipped by barge through the EMT.

A truck loading rack would be constructed at the EOF to accommodate the necessary truck loading requirements. A truck unloading rack would be required at the Venoco Carpinteria Facility to transfer crude oil from the truck to an existing storage tank at the facility. The crude oil would be co-mingled with production from the Venoco Carpinteria Facility and transported via pipeline to Los Angeles area refineries.

Construction of the loading and unloading racks would occur in each facility's fenced area, in areas already previously disturbed. No additional land would be required. Construction and operation of the loading and unloading racks would be consistent with the existing industrial operations at the facilities and would not result in a change in land use or affect offsite uses. Trucking of oil would not result in impacts to agricultural resources.

Pipeline Transportation

This crude oil transportation method would involve the construction of an onshore 10-inch-diameter (25.4-centimeter [cm]) crude-oil pipeline from the EOF to the Plains All

American Pipeline (AAPL) at Las Flores Canyon. The proposed 10-inch-diameter (25.4-cm) pipeline would cross under Highway 101 near the EOF and run parallel to the north side of the highway for approximately 10 miles (16 kilometers [km]) to Las Flores Canyon. At Las Flores Canyon, the pipeline would run a short distance up the canyon to the AAPL pipeline pump station that is located at the ExxonMobil Santa Ynez Unit (SYU) oil and gas processing facility. The Venoco Pipeline would tie in directly to the AAPL and would not utilize any of the ExxonMobil SYU storage tanks. The pipeline would be installed along Calle Real, which runs parallel to Highway 101 north of the highway. Since Calle Real does not run the entire length of the proposed pipeline route, the pipeline would also cross a few stretches of private ranch/agricultural roads that parallel Highway 101.

Impact AG-1. Impacts to Agricultural Activities

Soil disturbance due to the pipeline construction could negatively affect agricultural activities (Less Than Significant, Class III).

Impact Discussion

Portions of the pipeline right-of-way would cross agricultural lands currently used for grazing and tree crop production. Some of these lands are protected under the Williamson Act. Prior to construction, all appropriate approvals and access to private land would be obtained. Construction of the pipeline may obstruct some private agricultural roads temporarily. Further, accidental spills from the pipeline would negatively affect topsoils and agricultural practices. Spills from the pipeline would be remediated and would not be expected to affect agricultural resources long-term. The pipeline construction would not convert prime agricultural land to non-agricultural use or impair the agricultural productivity of prime agricultural land, conflict with agricultural preserve programs, or have long-term effects on unique or other Farmland of State or Local Importance. Agricultural impacts associated with the pipeline construction would be expected to be adverse but less than significant (Class III).

4.13.6 Cumulative Projects Impact Analysis

The proposed Project would not contribute to cumulative impacts to agricultural resources.